

To: Name
From: Ron

HAROLD

East Feliciana's OSWALD

connection



Lee Harvey Oswald



Clay Shaw



David Ferrie

File photos

Were these three men in Clinton and Jackson three months before President Kennedy was assassinated? If so, why?

Stories by LARRY CATALANELLO/Magazine editor
Color photos by BILL FEIG/Advocate staff

They've come to be known collectively as "the Clinton witnesses," a misnomer since half of them are from Jackson, a few miles to the west but still in East Feliciana Parish.

Their contribution to history is that they place Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused murderer of President John F. Kennedy, in East Feliciana less than three months before the Nov. 22, 1963, assassination in Dallas.

Some of the witnesses saw two older men with Oswald. One they have identified as New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw, who in 1969 was tried and acquitted on a charge of conspiring to murder Kennedy. The other they have identified as David Ferrie, a New Orleans pilot who also has been a central figure in conspiracy theories advanced during the 28 years since the assassination.

Oswald, Shaw and Ferrie — now all dead — are among the central characters depicted in the recently released *JFK*, Oliver Stone's controversial film version of an alleged conspiracy and coverup in the Kennedy assassination.

The small but significant East Feliciana chapter was filmed in Clinton, but cut from the final version of the three-hour movie.

One afternoon in the late summer of 1963, Edwin Lea McGeehe returned from lunch to re-open his barbershop, Lea's, on Market Street, which is the name for La. 10 as it forms the main drag through Jackson.

The little single-chair shop is wedged into a row of storefronts along Jackson's "hill." In 1963, the barber chair was a white-and-silver antique. A wooden bench against one side wall formed a waiting area. The walls were stucco and a fan hung from the middle of the 12-foot ceilings.

On the fateful day, McGeehe recalls it was unseasonably cool and that he had left the door open after returning from lunch.

"This stranger walks in the door," McGeehe remembers. The barber, who is now East Feliciana's registrar of voters, believes the man was wearing a light jacket, which he removed to reveal a Hawaiian-style shirt.

"He said, 'I need a haircut.'"

McGeehe remembers thinking that the customer really didn't need a haircut.

"A barbershop is a good place to get information," he remembers his customer saying.

During the haircut, McGeehe says the

stranger said he was from New Orleans and was looking for work. He inquired about possible openings at East Louisiana State Hospital in Jackson.

When McGeehe mentioned that it was a mental institution, he says his customer at first appeared startled, then asked whether there were all kinds of jobs there.

"He said, 'I have a wife and a child and I need a job,'" McGeehe recalls.

McGeehe remembers thinking, "This fellow looks legit; I'm going to help him."

McGeehe says he told the man he should talk to Reeves Morgan, then a state representative, and that it also might help if he were a registered voter in the parish.

McGeehe drew his customer a map to Morgan's house, a short drive from downtown Jackson, and bade him farewell. The stranger never offered his name and departed after the 15-minute encounter.

If it was Oswald, who had defected to the Soviet Union in 1959, the Old Bank Building directly across from the shop could not have escaped his notice as he stepped back out onto Market Street. The building's odd architecture and Russian-style dome sets it apart from the rest of downtown Jackson.

McGeehe didn't see what car the man got into. He noticed a green car with a woman inside parked on Market Street just past his shop. It — and another car around the corner whose color he didn't notice — pulled off at the same time. He feels the stranger could have been in either — or neither — car.

It has since been established that Oswald neither had a driver's license nor had he ever learned to drive.

In 1963, State Rep. Reeves Morgan lived in the aptly named "Old House" on the then-gravel Dawson Road just outside Jackson. Built in 1869, the small wooden structure had an open front porch, a storm cellar on one side and a cistern in back. Ancient knotted cedars lined both sides of the dwelling. From the house, a view of the inclined gravel driveway across the front lawn was obstructed by more trees, which today are replaced by shrubbery.

Morgan says he was stoking up a big trash fire in his fireplace in the parlor when he heard a knock at the front door. He thinks it was late August and that the temperature had inexplicably dropped to the upper 50s.

(Continued on Page 12)

MAGAZINE/PA. 1. IMPRATOR ROUGE, LA.



Edwin Lee McGehee peers through the window of his barber shop in Jackson.



Reeves Morgan outside the house where Lee Harvey Oswald visited him in 1963.

(Continued from Page 11)

Morgan says a young man in a light tan jacket identified himself as Lee Oswald and said he needed a job. Morgan says he remembers the name because he talked about it for a while, offering that he had heard of "Oswald" as a first name, but not as a last name.

After inviting the man in, Morgan says they sat by the fireplace and talked for about half an hour. He says Oswald told him he was going to register to vote and apply for a job at East Louisiana State Hospital. Morgan says his visitor said he could do all types of work and specifically mentioned having electrician's skills.

Morgan remembers his visitor as having "a funny manner of speaking," though he could not elaborate. After seeing the man to the door, Morgan says the front trees blocked his view of the car in which his visitor departed.

Meanwhile, across the parish in Clinton, a black voter registration drive was under way during this same period, according to *Advocate* newspaper files. The effort was sponsored by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), a civil-rights group that was active in the early '60s.

Several CORE workers as well as the parish registrar of voters and the Clinton Town Marshal noticed some strange outsiders near the registrar's office, according to *Advocate* newspaper files.

Some of the witnesses could not be located 28 years later and at least one has died. But what follows is a brief summary of their testimony at the Clay Shaw trial in 1969, according to *Advocate*.

Clinton Town Marshal John Manchester testified that during the registration drive a black Cadillac, parked outside the registrar's office was called to his attention. He said he checked out the situation.

In court, Manchester identified the defendant, Shaw, as the man in the driver's seat. Manchester testified Shaw said he was representing the International Trade Mart. It has later been established that Shaw was director of the Trade Mart at the time.

The marshal said he reported to Registrar Henry Earl Palmer that he had "nothing to fear from the people in the car."

Manchester has since moved out of state and could not be located.

At the trial, Palmer, the registrar, identified Oswald as one of only two whites in the long line of prospective voters. He said he passed Oswald in line at least six times. Palmer also identified Shaw and Ferrie as the occupants of the black Cadillac.

Palmer testified that when Oswald reached the front of the line he made no attempt to register to vote. Instead, Palmer said, Oswald spoke to him about getting a job at East Louisiana State Hospital and showed Palmer his Navy identification card made out to Lee H. Oswald with a New Orleans address.

The registrar testified he advised Oswald to apply at the hospital or talk with the mayors of Clinton or Jackson or to State Rep. Morgan.

Palmer is now deceased. Coincidentally, his successor as registrar is McGehee, the Jackson barber who had cut Oswald's hair.

Two CORE workers in Clinton at the time also testified at the Shaw trial. One testified

Shaw and Oswald; and the other pointed to Shaw, Oswald and Ferrie as being the outsiders present in Clinton.

Finally, two East Louisiana State Hospital employees testified in New Orleans that Oswald had filled out a job application there in 1963. By 1964, the application could not be located, they testified.

At the trial, Shaw denied having ever met Oswald or Ferrie. Ferrie had died in 1967 shortly before Garrison was to have him arrested in connection with the case.

Following the assassination and news reports picturing the accused assassin, McGehee and Morgan say they had no doubt as to the identity of the stranger who had paid them separate visits three months earlier. They're sure it was Lee Harvey Oswald.

Morgan says he telephoned the FBI office in Baton Rouge shortly after the assassination to report Oswald's presence in East Feliciana a few months earlier. Morgan said the person he spoke with in the FBI office said, "We already know about that."

McGehee and Morgan say they were never contacted by the FBI or the Warren Commission, which issued its official report in 1964 naming Oswald as the lone assassin. The East Feliciana incidents were not mentioned in either the Warren Report or the accompanying 26 volumes of evidence. Curiously, the East Feliciana witnesses had information about a time period — Aug. 22 through Sept. 17 — for which the Warren Commission could not account for Oswald's whereabouts.

McGehee and Morgan first came into contact

cial asked him about the stay when U.S. Rep. John Rarig for the area at the time, said a Shreveport newspaper some of the East Feliciana lished a story.

It was at this point that Attorney Jim Garrison had a possible New Orleans-based assassin Kennedy. Garrison apparently got wind of the East on and began interviewing Jackson witnesses.

The witnesses — including McGehee — finally got to the record in 1969 at Clay Orleans.

After the Shaw trial, International media showed interviewing the East Feliciana news stories and documents.

They were again contacted McGehee said, when the Committee on Assassinations Baton Rouge to give tape pieces together Oswald's months preceding the assassination.

Today, Edwin Lee McGehee's barber chair has a newer model, the work retired in favor of five chairs have been covered with a barber pole has been moved cuts hair only on Saturday of his time to the Registrar.



ted him in 1963

He asked him about the story was around 1966, when U.S. Rep. John Rarick, the Congressman for the area at the time, inquired about it. He said a Shreveport newspaper then interviewed some of the East Feliciana witnesses and published a story.

It was at this point that New Orleans District attorney Jim Garrison had begun to investigate possible New Orleans-based conspiracy to assassinate Kennedy. Garrison's investigators apparently got wind of the East Feliciana goings-on and began interviewing the Clinton and Jackson witnesses.

The witnesses — including Morgan and McGehee — finally got to tell their stories for the record in 1969 at Clay Shaw's trial in New Orleans.

After the Shaw trial, McGehee said, the international media showed interest and began interviewing the East Feliciana witnesses for news stories and documentaries.

They were again contacted officially in 1978, McGehee said, when the U.S. House Select Committee on Assassinations called them to Baton Rouge to give taped depositions to help piece together Oswald's whereabouts in the months preceding the assassination.

Today, Edwin Lea McGehee's antique barber chair has been replaced by a newer model, the wooden bench has been replaced in favor of five chairs, the stucco walls have been covered with dark paneling and the barber pole has been moved inside. McGehee is open only on Saturdays now, devoting most of his time to the Registrar's office.

McGehee, 77, has moved into the

next house on Dawson Road. He is retired but still pursues a political career after two terms in the state legislature and a stint on the East Feliciana Parish Police Jury. He is now running for a seat on the Police Jury again.

Oswald was shot to death while in police custody two days after the assassination. He was 24. Ferrie died of a brain hemorrhage in 1967 at the age of 49. Shaw died of cancer in 1974 at the age of 61. Garrison retired Nov. 1, 1991, from the state 4th Circuit Court of Appeal, where he had served for 13 years.

And controversy still surrounds the circumstances of the Kennedy assassination more than 28 years later.

The Warren Commission concluded that Oswald acted alone in murdering the president. In the mid-'70s, among growing public discontent with this finding, the U.S. House Select Committee on Assassinations began a new investigation. In its final report in 1979, the committee concluded that Oswald had fired the fatal shots. However, it further stated that, based on acoustical evidence, another gunman had fired one shot from the "grassy knoll" area in Dealey Plaza in Dallas. The committee ruled there was a "high probability" that Kennedy was killed as a result of a conspiracy and that organized crime probably had had a hand in it.

The committee turned its fresh evidence over to the U.S. Department of Justice with a recommendation that the new leads be pursued. The Justice Department said in 1988 that the acoustical evidence had been misinterpreted, but, to date, no new official pronouncements have been made. Books and movies continue to dispute the official version. ■

Two schools of thought on why they were there

What possible motive could Lee Harvey Oswald, Clay Shaw and David Ferrie have for taking a trip to East Feliciana Parish in the summer of 1963?

Two theories are put forth by assassination researchers. Both pre-suppose that Oswald was being manipulated by others, perhaps as a paid participant in an operation the purpose of which he was not aware.

Many feel the man identified as Shaw was, in fact, Guy Banister, best remembered as the Ed Asner character in *JFK* who administers a drunken pistol-whipping on Jack Lemmon.

Shaw and Banister fit the same general description: tall, heavily built, wavy gray hair. Banister, a former FBI agent, had strong anti-communist leanings and was an associate of Ferrie's. Banister's 544 Camp St. office address in New Orleans somehow appeared on the Fair Play for Cuba leaflets that Oswald had been distributing earlier that August. (How or why pro-communist literature was stamped with an anti-communist's address has never been answered.)

This theory is laid forth by Warren Commission critic Paul L. Hoch in his newsletter, *Echoes of Conspiracy*.

During the Oswald sighting in Clinton, a black voter registration drive was being sponsored by the Coalition of Racial Equality (CORE). Some segregationists had charged that CORE was a communist front group. Hoch writes that perhaps an effort was under way to use Oswald to "link CORE to the pro-Castro Fair Play for Cuba Committee."

Henry Hurt, in his 1985 book, *Reasonable Doubt*, writes that "anyone

who participated in such a scheme would have good reason for wanting to conceal the story and their own participation. Such participants would, predictably, run for cover following the assassination, no matter how unrelated the two events might have been."

This general theory would seem to leave unexplained Oswald's stated interest in gaining employment at East Louisiana State Hospital, the single common thread running through the stories of many of the Jackson and Clinton witnesses.

Jim Garrison, the former New Orleans district attorney who prosecuted Shaw, has another theory. He feels that the visit to Clinton and Jackson was part of a continuing "sheepdipping" of Oswald.

Garrison defines that term in his 1988 book, *On the Trail of the Assassins*. He says "sheepdipping" is the intelligence community's term for "manipulated behavior designed to create a desired image" — in this case that of a "crazed communist assassin." This theory maintains that Oswald simply chanced upon the CORE voter drive while trying to get a job at the mental hospital.

Garrison writes: "A few weeks of menial work there would have been enough to complete the picture of Oswald wandering haplessly from one job to another. . . . With a bit of luck and a little orchestration, it might even have been possible — with a switch of cards from 'employee' to 'patient' — to have the right psychiatrist at Jackson describe the problems he had in treating this strange outpatient named Lee Oswald." ■

Officials, authors find the witnesses credible

How believable are the East Feliciana witnesses who say they saw Lee Harvey Oswald in their parish three months before the Kennedy assassination?

Very, according to writers and officials familiar with the case. It should be noted in the direct quotations that follow that the term "Clinton witnesses" is used to encompass the Jackson witnesses as well.

The U.S. House Select Committee on Assassinations examined six of these witnesses. The committee's final report issued in 1979 states: "The Committee found that the Clinton witnesses were credible and significant. . . . If the witnesses were not only truthful but accurate as well in their accounts, they established an association of an undetermined nature between (David) Ferrie, (Clay) Shaw and (Lee) Oswald less than three months before the assassination." ■

Author Henry Hurt, in his book, *Reasonable Doubt*, takes an otherwise dim view of New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison's prosecution of Shaw. But of the East Feliciana witnesses, Hurt writes: "Remarkably diverse witnesses, they testified with impressive consistency."

"The testimony was a convincing boost to the basic prosecution assertion that Shaw, in contrast to his sworn denials, did know Ferrie and Oswald. The consensus among courtroom observers was that these witnesses were the most persuasive presented by the prosecution."

Hurt continues: "This fresh evidence, never mentioned by the Warren Commission, was Garrison's most valuable contribution to an understanding of Oswald's activities. It was virtually lost in the circus atmosphere that characterized the rest of the trial. From that point forward, everything was downhill for Garrison's case against Shaw." ■